



JEFFERSON COUNTY VETERANS' SERVICES OFFICE



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REPORT TO THE HONORABLE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, JEFFERSON COUNTY, WI

This office functions under the direction of the Veterans Service Officer, who is appointed by the County Administrator. Policy oversight for local aid to Veterans in need is provided by the County Veterans Service Commission.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

Chapter 45 of the WI Statutes requires each County to have a County Veterans Service Officer and establishes duties of the Veterans Service Officer. The position is funded by County tax revenue and offset by a \$13,000 annual grant provided through the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Trust Fund.

All Jefferson County resident veterans and their dependents may receive assistance through the Veterans' Service office. This office provides information and processes applications for both state and federal benefits such as disability compensation, non-service connected pension, VA healthcare, vocational training, educational programs, insurance, domiciliary care and burial benefits.

Veterans and dependents experiencing temporary financial emergencies are assisted with funds from the Veterans Service Commission. In 2015, \$7,165.81 in aid was expended by the Veterans Service Commission in the form of food and gas gift cards, payments directly to utility providers, landlords, etc. This amount was down slightly from 2014's expenditures of \$8,380.00. We were fortunate to receive generous donations from service organizations and private citizens in 2015 totaling \$13,381. A total of \$8,735.19 was rolled into the 2016 Veterans Service Commission budget.

Transportation of Veterans to the Madison VA Hospital is provided in partnership with the Federal VA through a Government Services Administration (GSA) contract which allows the County Veterans Service Office to lease an 8 passenger van for \$250 per month. The Federal VA covers the cost of fuel and vehicle maintenance; Jefferson County must provide the volunteer drivers. We are grateful to the Jefferson County Human Services Transportation Office for their assistance in coordinating the volunteer drivers and scheduling rides for veterans--and especially to the dedicated volunteer drivers who literally make the program go!



A. ECONOMIC IMPACT OF VETERANS BENEFITS IN JEFFERSON COUNTY IN 2015

The 2014 economic impact statistics had not been released by the VA as of the date of my last annual report—but I can now share the Federal Veterans Administration's 2014 and 2015 *Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDX)* report statistics; Jefferson County presently has an approximate resident population of 6,162 (live) veterans out of about 410,00 in Wisconsin. In addition to the Veterans themselves, other residents of Jefferson County are also potential recipients of veteran's benefits -- including veteran's spouses, dependent children and dependent parents. The economic impact to the county is substantial:

1. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is currently dispensing compensation and/or pension benefits to over 1,000 veterans, widows and families in Jefferson County. The federally reported "Total VA Expenditures for (FY14) reflects that \$32,641,000 in federal financial benefits were paid to Jefferson County veterans through disability compensation, pensions, education, vocational rehabilitation, health care and life insurance. In FY15, we saw that number increase to \$34,451,000. The *Summary of Expenditures by County* report can be found at: <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/> .

2. The State of Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs dispensed \$18,134.92 in financial benefits to Jefferson County veterans in 2015. Of that, \$8,014.92 was granted as subsistence aid to veterans who lost work due to an illness or injury, and \$10,120.00 was for dental/health care aid grants. There were no grants awarded for education or retraining--which is why the overall grant awards are down overall from the 2014 total of \$19,320.99—despite the fact that subsistence and dental grant amounts were both higher than the previous year. These numbers do not include the value of tuition remission provided under the WI GI Bill.

These figures also don't include state funds expended for care of Jefferson County residents at the Wisconsin Veteran's Home at King, and Union Grove, Wisconsin—or the value of property tax remitted to 100% service-disabled veterans. The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs personal/home improvement loan programs continue to be in hiatus due to lack of funding.

B. MAJOR TRENDS IN THE VETERANS SERVICE BUSINESS

The Federal VA continues to improve the timeliness of the claims process. We are currently submitting most claims by fax to the Janesville "Evidence Intake Center" --which is one of two contracted facilities in the US that scan everything into the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). For reference, the other scanning center is in Georgia. The "paperless" environment is not perfect – but the turn-around time on a "fully developed" claim has decreased to an average of 90 to 120 days. The next innovation on the horizon will be gaining the ability upload claims and evidence directly to the Federal VA system through the "Stakeholder's Enterprise Portal" (SEP). The VA continues to promote the idea that Veterans can file their own claims through the eBenefits.com website--but statistically--Veterans who apply for benefits online are less than successful overall. Many Veterans are confused by the array of documentation needed to support their disability claim. Because the individual Veteran is not an expert on what or how issues can be claimed—the outcome of their claim may be a lower (or denied) benefit. The value of the County Veteran Service office is our ability to help navigate the VA system. We continue to scan all incoming and outgoing mail and uploading it to our online VETRASPEC database. This technology has improved our efficiency in that we are able to call up a veterans file with a moment's notice if they phone or stop by. Having a copy of all correspondence is also important because occasionally we've been asked by the Federal VA to resend claims that have been lost to the digital ether.

Another key focus of the Federal VA has been its initiative to end homelessness in the Veteran population by 2015. I don't know that it will ever be possible to completely end homelessness in the Veteran population—but until then our office continues to partner with the Community Action Coalition through a grant program that was initiated in 2012. The Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) provides case management and temporary financial assistance to low-income veterans (single individuals and those with families) to help them maintain stable housing.

I am happy to report that Jefferson County Veterans continue to enjoy the private counseling room in our office-suite to meet with counselors from the Madison Vet Center and the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Representative from the Department of Workforce Development.

C. JEFFERSON CVSO 2015 STATISTICAL PERFORMANCE MEASURES

| Total Federal VA Expenditures in 2015 | Jefferson County expenditure for Veterans Service office in 2015 | Return on Investment |
|---------------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| \$34,451,000 | \$165,291.19 (.24% of Total County expenditures) | 20,742% |

| Federal DVA Expenditures County Comparison | | |
|---|--------------|---------------------|
| County | Population | Expenditures |
| Waupaca* | 5,033 | \$47,275,000 |
| Marinette | 4,172 | \$41,479,000 |
| Chippewa | 5,458 | \$32,806,000 |
| Jefferson | 6,272 | \$32,641,000 |
| St. Croix | 6,153 | \$31,695,000 |
| Douglas | 4,311 | \$29,782,000 |
| Sauk | 4,551 | \$28,312,000 |
| Columbia | 4,975 | \$28,003,000 |
| Portage | 4,767 | \$27,399,000 |
| Ozaukee | 6,147 | \$26,763,000 |
| Polk | 3,750 | \$23,693,000 |
| Oneida | 3,659 | \$23,633,000 |
| Barron | 3,748 | \$23,499,000 |
| * Includes the WI Veterans' Home Data | | |

| Wisconsin DVA Expenditures County Comparison | | |
|---|--------------|-----------------|
| County | Population | Expenditures |
| Jefferson | 6,272 | \$18,134 |
| Sauk | 4,551 | \$7,050 |
| Portage | 4,767 | \$5,849 |
| Columbia | 4,975 | \$3,088 |
| Ozaukee | 6,147 | \$1,500 |
| Chippewa | 5,458 | \$836 |
| St. Croix | 6,153 | \$550 |
| Waupaca* | 5,033 | \$542 |
| Marinette | 4,172 | \$0 |
| Douglas | 4,311 | \$0 |
| Oneida | 3,659 | \$0 |
| Barron | 3,748 | \$0 |
| * Includes WI Veterans Homes data | | |

Respectfully Submitted,

Yvonne R. Dusterhoft